



LEADER LETTERS COLUMNISTS

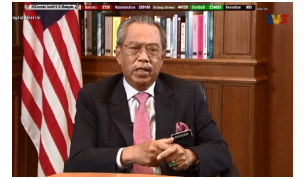
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## Ensuring quality education during a pandemic

January 27, 2021 @ 12:10am



Students' experience on campus, where interactions occur between them and their peers as well as their lecturers, greatly helps to nurture them towards becoming balanced graduates, as propounded by the Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan. - NSTP/NIK ABDULLAH NIK OMAR

**LETTERS:** Since the first Movement Control Order (MCO) began on March 18 last year, students and lecturers in public universities have had to contend with online teaching and learning. Undoubtedly, online learning has its advantages and is a good complement to face-to-face learning.

However, after almost a year, we still hear grouses from lecturers and students regarding the effectiveness of online learning. It is probably a good time to look at how to ensure continuity of quality education at public universities.

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), in line with its Sejahtera Academic Framework, sees education from a broader perspective, involving the whole student experience rather than limited only to formal education, be it in the classroom or online.

Students' experience on campus, where interactions occur between them and their peers as well as their lecturers, greatly helps to nurture them towards becoming balanced graduates, as propounded by the Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan.

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Universities must consider students' opinions when devising strategies to ensure quality education during this pandemic. A survey among IIUM students revealed that 64 per cent of respondents were willing to return to campus for a more engaging learning experience, while 55 per cent were willing to be confined in campus so that the risk of Covid-19 infection can be reduced. This indicates their determination to experience quality education despite the pandemic.

Measures to manage students' presence on campus must be all-inclusive, addressing the aspects of teaching and learning, safety, health and welfare of students. Universities can take pointers from their experience in managing students on campus during the first wave of Covid-19 last year. For instance, being selective of students who can be on campus.

Students without access to devices or the Internet for online learning and those who don't have conducive learning environments at home should be allowed to be on campus. Similarly for students with special needs.

This is important so that no student is left behind in their education. Students who must undergo practical or hands-on training in laboratories and studios should also be allowed to be on campus so that their learning can be effective.

Universities must also consider their organisational capacities in ensuring the safety and welfare of students on campus. Clear and concise communication is also a factor in ensuring the safety of students and staff on campus.

Universities must disseminate information accurately and speedily so that preventive and mitigative actions can be swiftly undertaken to curb threats.

Decisions must also be consistent and conveyed as early as possible so that everyone will have sufficient lead time to plan for actions that they need to do.

IIUM employed various measures to ensure information is disseminated accurately and promptly to its community. For instance, the IIUM Sejahtera Council was established to become the only body responsible for issuing official Covid-19-related announcements and guidelines in the university.

IIUM also adopted the Tiered Covid-19 Alert System and Standard Action Procedure to simplify matters and to avoid confusion among its community with regard to actions to combat Covid-19.

To ensure the safety of university campuses from Covid-19, students and staff must abide by the guidelines and standard operating procedures issued by universities and the government. Additionally, the government must also support universities to devise solutions to combat Covid-19.

Standard solutions across all universities are not recommended because each university is different due to differences in location and number and composition of students. Universities should share their best practices so



that they can be adapted by other universities.

Universities are knowledge institutions and should remain as a source of wisdom in ensuring the continuity of quality education in every situation.

**Dr Muhammad Faris Abdullah**

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The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Straits Times

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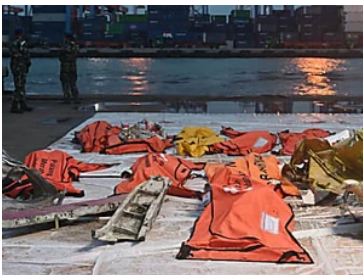
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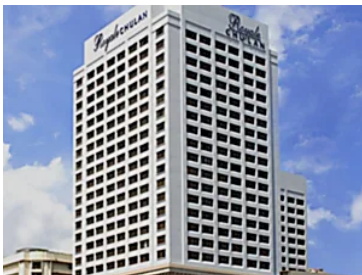
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